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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004260

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [SY](#) [SYRIA](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIAN DFM VISITS ANKARA, FM GUL REPORTEDLY FEELS "USED"

REF: ANKARA 4079

(U) Classified by CDA Nancy McEldowney, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Syrian DFM al-Muallim met with FM Gul in Ankara July 22 to discuss Iraq, the Israel Palestine peace process, and a possible upcoming "unofficial" visit to Turkey by Bashar Asad (reftel). One MFA official told us privately that the discussions were difficult and inconclusive; another emphasized the strong message Gul and MFA U/S Tuygan delivered on Iraq. After the meeting, Gul expressed anger at the way the Syrians are "using" the Turks and is looking for an indirect way to turn off the Asad visit. How PM Erdogan will react remains unclear. End Summary.

DFM Al-Muallim Comes With "Important Message"

2. (C) MFA spokesperson Tan confided to Charge privately that the Syrians had insisted that DFM al-Muallim visit Ankara July 22 to deliver an "important message." Tan asserted to Charge that the MFA has been uncomfortable with Syrian handling of the visit. Tan claims the MFA wants to keep the visit quiet, but has been frustrated by Syrian press leaks, which he said forced the MFA to announce al-Muallim's visit. Al-Muallim plans a press conference at the Syrian Embassy in Ankara later July 22.

FM Gul: "Syrians Are Using Us"

3. (C) According to Tan, who was present at the Gul meeting with al-Muallim, the latter raised Iraq, Israel/Palestine peace, and the Asad visit. On Iraq, al-Muallim gave Gul a non-paper (e-mailed to EUR/SE July 22) detailing Syria's supposed efforts to control the Syria/Iraq border. Tan claimed Gul told al-Muallim to "listen to what the Americans tell you," adding there would be serious consequences if Syria did not. Al-Muallim protested that Syria was doing all it could to control the border.

4. (C) Al-Muallim urged the Turks to play a more active role in the Israel/Palestine peace process (NFI). (Tan's reaction to Charge was "we do not need them to tell us that.") On the Asad visit, Al-Muallim only told Gul it would be some time over the next several weeks.

5. (C) Tan described Gul as "upset" after the meeting. He told Tan he was angry, saying several times the Syrians are "using" Turkey. Tan told Charge Gul wants the visit turned off, but feels cornered and cannot directly say no. Tan claims the Turks will try to propose arrangements they believe the Syrians will not accept.

Another Take

6. (C) Under instruction from MFA U/S Ali Tuygan, Middle East DDG Safak Gokturk provided a debrief of the al-Muallim's meetings to PolMilCouns. After the Gul meeting (that Gokturk also attended), Tuygan hosted a working lunch. Gokturk's account of the discussion was largely consistent with Tan's:

-- On Iraq, Gokturk said Gul had asked al-Muallim that if Syria desires a stable and united Iraq, it must choose whether it wants to simply wait to blame the US if it doesn't succeed, or to work for a successful political transition. If the process in Iraq fails, Syria will also be blamed, Gul warned. Both Gul and Tuygan argued strongly that no matter what measures the SARG has taken on the border, it needed to take more visible steps to allay both US and Iraqi suspicions. Gokturk assessed that Damascus was open to working with the ITG and the USG on a border cooperation framework, but the Syrians were looking for some reciprocal benefit for themselves.

-- On Israel/Palestine, Gul warned al-Muallim, who said Syria wanted to restart negotiations with Israel, that Turkey is ready to play a role but complained that Turkish efforts in the past year when asked by one side or the other "have not been utilized." If Turkey is asked again, Syria should come up with "concrete responses." Al-Muallim tried to contrast US pressure on Syria to expel Palestinian extremists and the

PA President's recent request that the SARG press these groups to join the peace effort. Polmilcouns observed that these approaches were consistent -- both the USG and the PA believe Syria retains influence with these groups.

-- On Asad's visit, Gokturk said al-Muallim reminded the Turks that PM Erdogan had extended the invitation last year.

17. (C) Comment: Despite this readout from two MFA sources, we cannot predict how PM Erdogan will react to al-Muallim's visit. We would note that Gul and PM Erdogan are locked in a serious, if partially hidden, rivalry. Gul has consistently used channels to foreigners to deprecate Erdogan and to make himself appear more reasonable while continuing to rely heavily on foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoglu, who has been the catalyst for Turkey's rapprochement with Syria. End Comment.  
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